

## The Month Brothers

Even though Cinderella had three stepsisters and Marushka only had one, that one stepsister was as mean as all three of Cinderella's put together. Not only did she and her mother make Marushka do all the work but they never said anything to her that wasn't unkind. But Marushka never let their meanness affect her for she was always kind and pleasant to everyone she met. She took good care of the plants in the garden and was kind to all of the animals that lived there as well. Marushka was liked by everyone in her village which made her stepsister very jealous. Marushka's stepmother did not like how everyone in the village would have something to say to Marushka but would avoid her and her daughter whenever possible.

One day Marushka's stepmother decided that enough was enough. She wanted Marushka to leave the house forever even though it had been Marushka's father's house and she had lived there all her life. Her own daughter's birthday was coming up and that gave her an idea. She called Marushka to her. "Tomorrow is your stepsister's birthday and she deserves a special present," said the stepmother. "I want you to go out into the forest and bring back a bouquet of violets for her." "But it's January!" replied Marushka. "Violets don't grow in January!" "I'm sure there are some out there somewhere," answered the stepmother. "Go out there and find them and don't bother coming back until you do!" Poor Marushka had no choice but to leave the house. The stepmother smiled for she was sure she wouldn't be seeing Marushka again.

It was snowing when Marushka left the house. "I don't know how I'm going to find anything for the ground is covered with snow," she thought. "Even if violets could grow under the snow, I'd never find them." She had no idea what to do as she walked deeper and deeper into the forest. After walking for a long time, Marushka became cold and tired. She was worried for she could not go back to the house to warm up. Suddenly up ahead she saw the glow of a fire deep in the forest. She headed toward it and when she got there she found a most unusual sight. It was a bonfire and around it were 12 men ranging in age from very old to very young. The oldest was holding a golden staff. Timidly Marushka approached them and asked if she could warm herself by the fire. The men were startled by her appearance. "What are you doing so deep in the forest?" exclaimed the youngest of the group. "My stepmother has sent me out to get violets for my stepsister's birthday," answered Marushka. "Violets don't grow in January!" answered the young man. "I know," replied Marushka, "but my stepmother won't let me come home without them and I have no idea what to do." The young one looked at the oldest one who was holding a staff. "Please, Brother January," he said, "let Brother April have the staff. It would only be for a little while." Brother January answered, "Yes, we will help her because she has a kind heart." He passed the staff to Brother April who tapped it on the ground. Immediately it stopped snowing and the nearby snow on the ground melted to reveal a patch of vivid purple violets. "Hurry," said the young man, "Pick as many as you can for there isn't much time." "Thank you!" said Marushka as she stooped down to pick the violets. "I am so grateful for your kindness." As soon as she was finished, Brother April returned the staff to Brother January and it immediately began to snow again.

Marushka quickly returned home and presented her stepsister with the violets. She and her stepmother were amazed that Marushka had found violets. They assumed that it was just luck that she had found them so the next morning they had another task for Marushka. "Violets are not enough. I would like some nice ripe strawberries. Go into the forest and get me some," said Marushka's stepsister. "Don't bother coming back until you have them," ordered her stepmother.

Again Marushka went out into the cold and snow and again she traveled deep into the forest. She was sure she would not be so lucky as to find the Month Brothers again but much to her surprise she soon saw the glow of their campfire ahead. Brother December saw her coming and asked, "Why are you back in the forest?" "My stepmother and stepsister want me to bring them strawberries this time," answered Marushka. With a sigh Brother December turned to Brother January who, without a word, passed the staff to Brother June. Brother June tapped the ground near him and the snow melted from the ground to reveal a patch of red, ripe strawberries. Marushka quickly picked as many as she could carry. "Thank you again," she said. "You are so very kind." The snow returned as soon as Brother June returned the staff to Brother January.

Marushka's step-mother and stepsister were again very surprised when Marushka returned home with the strawberries. It did not take the greedy stepsister long to eat them all. But that was not the end of it. The next morning Marushka's stepmother said to her, "Since you are so good at finding things in the snow, go back out and get my daughter some nice juicy apples. Don't come back without them!" For the third time Marushka left the warmth of the house to go out into the cold snow. For the third time she went deep into the woods. For the third time she found the Month Brothers and for the third time they gave her their help. Brother January passed the staff to Brother October who tapped the ground. The swirling snow stopped to reveal a tree full of apples. Marushka quickly picked as many as she could hold thanking the Month Brothers for helping her yet again. The staff was returned to Brother January and the tree disappeared into the falling snow. "I wish I could do something for you in return for your great kindness," said Marushka. "You need not do anything," replied Brother January. "Just keep kindness in your heart no matter what happens."

Marushka returned with the apples. Her stepsister ate them all. This time Marushka's stepmother demanded to know how Marushka was able to get fresh fruit in winter. Marushka explained about the Month Brothers. Marushka's stepsister complained that Marushka should have gotten more. "I took only as many as I could carry," said Marushka. "Well, I certainly could have carried more," replied the stepsister. "Indeed," said the stepmother, "If we had more we could sell them in the village. People would pay a great deal of money to have fresh fruit in winter. I will go out tomorrow and make the Month Brothers give me more than just a few apples. I will get enough to sell in the village." "If I go too," said the stepsister, "we can get twice as much to sell and make twice as much money." The next morning the stepmother and stepsister dressed in their warmest clothes and went out to find the Month Brothers. However, because they did not have kind hearts, they never found the Month Brothers. They wandered

so far away that they never returned to Marushka's home.

In spring Marushka planted seeds saved from the apples her step-sister had eaten. Very quickly they grew into strong apple trees around her garden protecting everything that grew in it. Whatever she planted grew and was plentiful no matter what the weather was. Marushka shared her bounty with all her neighbors. Every fall she would invite the village to a harvest celebration at her home. Often twelve strangers would come to join the celebration. Marushka always welcomed these visitors with great joy.

Linda A. Meuse

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<http://meusenotes.blogspot.com/>

Sources:

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This story was written to tell using flannel/magnet board figures or props. For suggestions see [\*Notes from the Story Room for February 17, 2012.\*](#)